Eric the Robot
Sept. 15, 1928

The first British robot, aptly called Eric, was built by William Richards and Alan Reffell to open *The Exhibition of the Society of Model Engineers* at London's Royal Horticultural Hall in 1928, after George VI (then the Duke of York) had cancelled his planned appearance. At the event, Eric successfully rose to his feet, bowed and gave a four-minute opening address, transmitted to him live by radio.

His chest bore the letters "R.U.R.", a reference to the robot manufacturer in Karel Čapek's [Jan 9] 1920 play of the same name. His aluminum exterior was modeled on a mediaeval knight's armor. His eyes were white bulbs with red pupils painted on them. Blue sparks emanated from his teeth.

Following his succesful debut, Eric went on tour in the US, including a visit to MIT, but disappeared thereafter. Good ideas rarely die though, and Eric was recreated for a Robots exhibition at the Science Museum in London in 2017, but missing his sparking teeth which were deemed unsafe.

George taking breakfast with William Richards in Berlin, 1930. Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-09312 / CC-BY-SA 3.0

In the 1930s Richards built another, similar, robot called "George", which took Eric's place and toured the world, including vists to Germany and Australia. Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper described him as "the educated gentleman, alongside his rough-hewn awkward brother".

Shockingly, historians believe that Eric had been "cannibalized" by Richards so that George could live.

For more robot men, see [Feb 00], [Feb 24], [March 23], [March 24], [April 16], [April 30], [July 17], [July 30], [Nov 11], [Nov 30], [Dec 22].

The ACM
Sept. 15, 1947

The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) held its first meeting at Columbia University in NYC, attended by 78 people, but as the Eastern Association for Computing Machinery until Jan. 1948. The association's early driving force was its secretary, Edmund Berkeley [Feb 22], aided by John H. Curtiss [Dec 23] (president) and John W. Mauchly [Aug 30] (vice-president). Berkeley had come up with the idea, drafted the first announcement, located other interested organizers, and arranged the first meeting. He served, without compensation, for some six years.

The association was made up of four geographic sections at first – Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, but has grown somewhat since then. Currently it has over 100,000 members from over 100 countries, and publishes over 50 journals including an excellent general magazine for computer professionals, the *Communications of the ACM* (CACM) .

The ACM is one of the trinity of professional societies that computing professionals tend to join, the others being the SIAM [April 30] and IEEE [Jan 1].

Atari Advertises
Sept. 15, 1978

During the Muhammad Ali – Leon Spinks World Heavyweight Championship bout, Atari [June 27] kicked off a six million dollar advertising campaign. This was more than the entire video gaming industry had spent on advertising in 1977.

It included three 30-second spots featuring stars like Carol Channing, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Billie Jean King, Jack Palance, and Pelé, and was based around the theme, "Don't Watch TV Tonight, Play It". Full-page ads also appeared in *People*, *Penthouse*, *Playboy*, and the *TV Guide*.

It was later estimated that the campaign reached 95% of US households.

Debian Released
Sept. 15, 1993

Debian was one of the earliest OSes based on the Linux kernel [March 14], and packaged together with free software, most of it under the GNU General Public License [Sept 27].

The OS had been announced on Aug. 16, by Ian Murdock, a student at Purdue University. Debian 0.01 came out on this day, and the first officially stable release arrived in 1996. Debian also debuted the Advanced Package Tool (APT) in Aug. 1998, which greatly simplified the installation of software

The word "Debian" is a portmanteau of the first name of Murdock's then-girlfriend (later his wife) Debra Lynn, and his first name.

The Debian "swirl" logo was designed by Raul Silva in 1999. There has been no official statement on the logo's meaning, but it may represent the magic smoke that makes computers work.

For more Linux distributions, see [Aug 15], [July 17], [Aug 11],

[Dec 22], [Oct 20], [April 15], and [Feb 19].

Hackers Released
Sept. 15, 1995

The film "Hackers" was directed by Iain Softley and starred Jonny Lee Miller and Angelina Jolie.

A teen hacker genius, Dade "Zero Cool" Murphy (Miller), must race against time to prevent the release of a dangerous computer virus while being pursued by the US Secret Service.

The film was derided for its wildly inaccurate portrayal of hacker culture and computing technology, even though it was reported that the film's writer, director, and some cast members attended a 2600 meeting [Jan 12], to observe and talk with real-life hackers.

The "Hacker Manifesto" [Jan 8], read out at one point during the movie was a real thing – it had been written by Loyd Blankenship (aka "The Mentor"). In addition, the featured "Cookie Monster" virus was based on an actual program from the 1970s [Oct 13].

Google Named
Sept. 15, 1997

Larry Page [March 26] and Sergey Brin [Aug 21] decided that their BackRub [Aug 29] search engine [Aug 29] needed a new name, and came up with Google. The google.com domain was registered on this day, but the company was only officially incorporated on [Sept 7], 1998.

The name "Google" came from Sean Anderson, a graduate student at Stanford, who had suggested "googolplex" during a brainstorming session. Page countered with the shorter "googol," the digit 10^{100}, while googolplex is $10^{10^{100}}$. (Incidentally, Google's corporate headquarters is called the Googleplex.)

Anderson checked to see if the googol domain name was taken, but accidentally searched for "google.com" instead. Page liked that name even better, and thus it was registered.

One of the best known precursors for the word "google" is the comic strip *Barney Google*, which began in June 1919. The strip was created by cartoonist Billy DeBeck, with the name inspired by the Jazz hit "The Goo-Goo Song" (1900), and the children's book "The Google Book" (1913) by Vincent Cartwright Vickers. When Page started scanning books at Google [Oct 6], the first one was Vicker's.
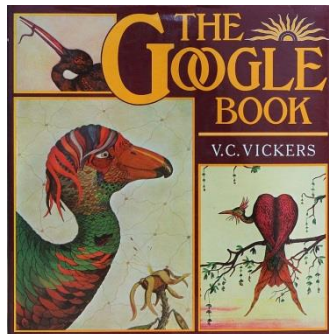
The cover of "The Google Book", by V.C. Vickers. Photo by DivorSpir. CC BY-SA 4.0.

In the late 1930s, mathematician Edward Kasner needed to come up with a name for a very large number, and asked his nine-year-old nephew, Milton Sirotta. He supplied "google", based on his reading of the comic strip, and Kasner later used "googol" and "googolplex" in his book, "Mathematics and the Imagination" (1940).

Enid Blyton used the phrase "Google Bun" in "The Magic Faraway Tree" (1941), and a recipe for the bun can be found online.

The Googleplex Starthinker super-computer appears in Douglas Adams' [March 11] "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" [March 8]. Built in the Seventh Galaxy of Light and Ingenuity, it has the ability to calculate the trajectory of every single dust particle during a five-week Dangrabad Beta sand blizzard.

US-CERT Created
Sept. 15, 2003

Carnegie Mellon (CMU) and the Department of Homeland Security announced the creation of the US Computer Emergency Readiness Team (US-CERT) to address national computer security issues. The "R" originally stood for "Response", which sounds somewhat more eager.

US-CERT shouldn't be confused with the CERT Coordination Center (CERT/CC), also based at CMU, which was formed in response to the Morris Worm incident of [Nov 2] 1988. US-CERT handles US national security, whereas CERT/CC handles more general, often international, cases.

CERT/CC coordinates with US-CERT and other computer security incident response teams, some of which also use the name "CERT." While these organizations **cert**ainly license the name from CMU, they are **cert**ified independent entities in their own countries. The distinction can be discon**cert**ing.

First MOOC
Sept. 15, 2008

The first massive open online course (MOOC), "Connectivism and Connective Knowledge/2008" (CCK08), was opened by George Siemens and Stephen Downes on this day.

Based on a for-credit course at the University of Manitoba, the contents were available through RSS feeds [March 15]. Students participated online through blog posts, threaded discussions in Moodle (a learning management system), and in Second Life [June 23] meetings. Around 2,200 people signed up, and 170 of them were active enough to create their own blogs.

Another candidate for first MOOC is "Introduction to Artificial Intelligence", offered by Sebastian Thrun [May 14] and Peter Norvig [Dec 14],

which started on Aug. 15, 2012. More than 160,000 students from 190 countries joined the course, and the large response encouraged Thrun and others to found Udacity [Feb 20] in 2012. Indeed, that year saw a burst of MOOC creation, with the appearance of Coursera [April 18] and MIT's edX [May 2] as well.

Prior to the Web, MOOC-like teaching was commonly categorized as "distance learning", such as the courses offered by the UK's Open University [April 23].

M3 Described
Sept. 15, 2014

The University of Michigan Micro Mote (M3) is the smallest computer in the world, measuring just 2 x 4 x 4 mm (although that does depend on your definition of "computer"). Each mote contains built-in solar cells, a battery, a microprocessor, sensors, and a radio that can transmit data up to 2 meters. A mote is sent information by means of a high frequency strobing light.

There were originally three types, designed to measure temperature, pressure, or snap images (at 160 x 160 pixel resolution).

The device was developed by David Blaauw, Dennis Sylvester, David Wentzloff, and Prabal Dutta over a decade., but was formerly first described in a conference paper given on this day.

Motes are also known as "smart dust," since their tiny size and low cost make them inexpensive enough to "sprinkle" in the real world as sensors. Kris Pister at Berkeley coined the phrase in 1996, concluding that within a few years, "We will program the walls and the furniture, and some day even the insects and the dust."